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ABSTRACT

This review considers the traditional male sex role in terms of values, beliefs, expectations, orientation, stereotyping, socialization and resistance to social change. Male/female interaction within occupational and emotional spheres is discussed. Findings indicate that male resistance to female role change is great. It is concluded that men must give up all notions of gender roles, and of superiority, if they are to become more accepting of social change. (JLL)

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THE ADULT MALE SEX ROLE AND RESISTANCE TO [redacted] CHANGE

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THE ADULT MALE SEX ROLE AND RESISTANCE TO FEMALE CHANGE

Over the past decade many middle-class adult women have found new options available to them. The options generally have been to enter higher education or various occupations. For many married women their resultant role and self changes have resulted in conflict with their husbands. The husband has seen his wife enter new roles and has been reluctant or unwilling to accept the change in many cases. New reference groups and particular others encountered in the new role activities may effect changes on the wife which include basic values and beliefs. This may include the reappraisal of herself and her husband in both their old and new roles. It is our argument that the basis of this conflict rests in the mystique of masculinity and femininity which has been so effectively socialized into Americans. In this paper we want to examine the masculine mystique, its costs and possibilities for change.

The notion of masculinity conjures up a stereotype based on a romantic past. Masculinity may be the Marlboro man, the All-American athlete or an astronaut. The values are physical strength and courage allowing the man to protect the weaker members of society - women, children and the elderly. The stereotype also projects the real man as stoic and not revealing his emotions or feelings. Masculinity is almost always seen as outward oriented, revealing little or nothing about what is inside the man. Traditionally, the feminine role has been emotional, expressive and dependent.

The basic, stereotyped American view of masculinity clearly implies sexism. It is founded on the belief that one group of human beings have qualities different from another group. Rarely are these sex differences treated non-judgementally or as having equal weight. The differences imply rankings, invite comparisons, and differential assessments resulting in inequalities. Men often see themselves as different because they are men, their masculinity making them superior to women.

Often men oppress women by burdening them with the overwhelming weight of their masculinity and by using women to test their manhood. Manhood is a concept they believe in but are never secure about. Yet, probably most men have little personal awareness of the meaning of their masculinity. Often men respond to definitions by other men rather than to any real personal convictions. Many over-masculine pursuits are followed as a means of proving self-worth and exhibiting external mastery rather than being expressions resulting from any search for the self. Men's activities are often symbols which are interpreted as evidence of 'real masculinity' by others (i.e. contact sport, gambling, drinking in bars), and yet the activities <u>per se</u> are expressive of no inner motivation.

Men will typically stress the cultural traits of toughness, strength, self-sufficiency and the ability to success, believing that these 'masculine traits' are those which their wives find attractive. At the same time, men

they believe their wives will find these signs of weakness. "When the husband expresses dependency, he is for the moment giving up any pretension of superiority or ability to control and determine the relationship. The husband who is engaged in a power struggle with the wife perceives such a temporary abdication as very risky."[1] It is sad that often the male may want to flex his muscles in a world where muscle-flexing has been relegated to the grotesque world of weight lifters and body builders, and he is often hurt and angry when he is not taken seriously.

A major value in the American masculine world is to do - to be active and get things done. To do means to perform outward, to move into the world outside one's self. The measurement of masculinity comes to be what can be shown and what others can see. The training of males to be doers is often at the cost of emotions and feelings. Males are taught that their feelings are to be controlled, chanelled or repressed. Fernando Bartolome has written that the result is a vicious circle. "The less we recognize our feelings and learn to relate to them, the less chance we have of developing skills to deal with them - our own and others. And the less skillful we are, the more threatening feelings seem, and the more vehemently we deny them or avoid dealing with them."[2]

We have found evidence of the male fear of going inside himself in our work on friendship and aloneness. We have seen that men are far less interested in aloneness than

for possible reassurance of their selves. Men also often resist aloneness because it is basically un-masculine behavior. This is because it is introspective rather than gregarious, emotional rather than rational, and private rather than social.

Furthermore, society provides for and expects men to participate in sociable and gregarious activities in addition to their work and family activities, leaving very little time available for aloneness. The very structure of the traditional family during the early and middle child-rearing years provides women with far more alone time than men. Self-revealing interaction with a few close friends is often chosen by women in lieu of the type of sociable group activities common amongst men. Child-minding and close friendships can often be shared in terms of time, whereas group activities often necessitate alternative arrangements for young children. These alternatives - close friendships and sociable activities - are not only chosen disproportionately by sexual status, they are also provided as alternatives according to sexual status in the present structure of our society. Men are offered more opportunities for participation in sociable, group activities, while women frequently are not free to take such options even when available, and develop close friendships with a few others in situations where self-revealing interaction is possible. As women continue to move out into educational and occupational fields, their opportunities become wider. It is hard to see yet whether or not their desire for close friendships will alter with the changing

circumstances in their lives.

The masculine world of outward orientations has other perils for men. Often men are in competitive worlds, and because they are competing with other men, they must not reveal too much about themselves. Man often has to measure himself against others as well as against his previous behavior. And he has fears about how he will measure up in the future. Robert Seidenberg observes that if the male later in life feels or finds that he has not measured up, that his identity is incomplete or has suffered erosion, he is apt to view himself and the world in most unkind ways.[3] We have found in interviews with men that they often will not reveal even to those whom they called their very best friends many things about themselves because they see themselves as competitive. Yet the degree to which the men reveal themselves to the interviewer would support the belief that men can and will reveal a good deal to a 'suitable and safe' other.

The continuing strength of the masculinity cult is based on the fact that most men prefer a social world made up of other men, and that social expectations and structure provide many opportunities for all-male activities. Most men prefer to spend time with each other where they can plan and make decisions together as well as enjoy shared leisure time. The evidence is clear that most men spend much less time with women. While they turn to women as

Sometimes it is just enough time to establish heterosexuality. For many men, women are good to sleep with but not to stay awake with. Many of man's major energies are directed toward one another rather than to any heterosexual pursuits.

The world of men, much more so than that of women, tends to be in non-family groups, that is groups that are organized around a specific activity. As boys grow up, their masculine experiences are often as parts of teams, street gangs, military service, etc. The male learns young that membership in the group is important. He also learns that in the group he must establish his own position of power and to compete within the group while staying true to its principles.

American men have long been able to deal with the inanimate objects of the world more easily than with other human beings. Men grow up to build and shape things, and the interpersonal worlds have never been ones valued by men. Traditionally, if there have been emotional needs to deal with they have been left to women. Often anything that was emotional and internal wasn't seen as worthy of man's efforts.

In the competitive world the male believed he had to stay away from revealing much about himself. He sometimes felt he had to keep his own counsel and this often led to isolation and loneliness. Some men feel their isolation is worth the rewards of their successes. But for many, the loneliness of the self can be a frightening place from which

sociability and common activities provide some release or diversion. Men must first face up to the fears and anxieties they are not supposed to have if they are really masculine. Even recognizing how they feel, they may be unable to do anything about it. They may have been so effectively socialized that they can't confide in their wives or friends. They certainly will find it difficult to confide in others sharing the reality in question - the competitive and striving nature of masculinity will make it especially difficult to share family fears with family members or work worries with workmates. The risk of having such fears confirmed as well-founded may seem too great. The fact that men are stuck within themselves has come through clearly in our interviews. Women will overwhelmingly reveal many of their fears, anxieties and insecurities to their best friends, while men overwhelmingly will not. The close friend relationship between women is generally defined as one which is self-revealing and accepting, whereas the close friend relationship between men is subjectively defined in terms of doing things together.

In the private world of males there are very definite ideas about women. Generally, when women come into the male world they come in within the male value system. This means that women come into the male world in secondary statuses. "In a male homosocial world, women derive their status and resources vicariously through relationships with fathers, brothers, husbands, sons and lovers. This need to derive their status vicariously has influenced strongly women's achievement patterns, which often have taken a vicarious form."[4] By

excluding women from their world men perpetuate the value system of male's greater worth. By excluding women they prove to themselves that women deserve to be excluded. As Jean Lipman-Blumen says, women are excluded because of their lack of resources which make them less useful and interesting both to men and to other women. "Men, recognizing the power their male peers have, find one another stimulating, exciting, productive and important since they can contribute to virtually all aspects of one another's lives."[5]

There is a good deal of evidence that many men feel uncomfortable with women and don't want to have to relate to them. Of course, most men would deny this and retort that they really like women - often meaning they are sexually attracted. Even that is often only rhetoric and they are saying what they are expected to say and not what they feel. It may be that men are uncomfortable with women because women have more individuality and self-knowledge, which may not always support the role stereotypes that provide for the male ideal. In addition, if women are more self-revealing, the implicit obligation to reciprocate self-revealing exchanges may make the men uncomfortable. Men are more outward oriented which means they function within social limits and expectations. By contrast, women can be more introspective and self-reliant, and this leads to a great chance for variation in their private humanness. The women facing new opportunities are similar in ways to Alfred Schutz's concept of the stranger - being strange to increasing opportunities, they question many aspects of social life which the men (in

largely unchanged positions) have come to assume and take for granted. Their perspectives are different, the women questioning men's assumptions and men questioning women's questioning - no wonder there is some feeling of discomfort in their exchanges.[6]

Because men are outward oriented, they tend to construct roles about behavior. They see persons not as total human beings but as persons filling particular roles. They may see another man as a lawyer, a competitor in golf, a co-worker or a drinking partner. In this sense, most men do not see women as full human beings. They rather turn to their sets of role expectations and assign them to the woman in the light of the role in which they see her. They may choose whatever role seems most appropriate under any given circumstance and offer their responses accordingly. They may offer domination, sexual passion, fatherly advice, or whatever else they see as fitting the role in which they define the woman. One very good indication of how men feel about women is found in the paucity of men who would want to change places with women. Studies over the years have shown consistently that far fewer men than women wish they were the opposite sex.[7]

One of the most important areas of female/male interaction is within the occupational sphere. The history of women entering the work force has been met with male resistance, especially if the women were entering occupations valued by men. Very often men are highly threatened when their wives

enter the work force. Some see this as a threat to their basic masculinity. It would seem on the surface that men would welcome their wives' working. Why can't they take satisfaction in the added income, achievements, and pleasure derived by women from working? John Scanzoni sees the answer in terms of conlifct theory. By that he means that the dominant group of men feel they are losing power and that they must do something about such erosion. "Thus the issue of a married woman's working comes to be viewed as a challenge to male dominance. A negative reaction sets in because many men are reluctant to give up the power and privilege that have been associated with the traditional male's role of sole provider."[8]

There are many divorces and marital breakups blamed on a conflict of careers. What that often means is that the woman would not give up her career in deference to her husband's. Robert Gould has written that there are plenty of men sufficiently enlightened intellectually to accept the notion that a woman has as much right to a career as a man. But often these men in practice react emotionally when it comes to their wives and as a result often feel threatened and emasculated. "Because he is unable to see this in himself, such a man expresses his anxiety by forcing a 'conflict' with the woman in some other area of their relationship, like dealing with in-laws, or running the house, where there is, in fact, no conflict. In this way he deflects attention from his problem but also precludes adequate resolution of it in their relationship."[9]

Often the more successful the woman is, the more she is defined as unnatural. While a man's success is by definition good, for the woman to be successful is evidence of some deep flaw in her character. And success for men often justifies their deficiencies in other areas of their lives. It can even compensate for their weaknesses and personal failures. But for the woman to be successful is to call into question the integrity and value of her life.

. It is clear that the resistance by men to women in the high status occupations continues to be very strong. Some inroads are being made and more men are finding that what they took for granted is becoming less sure. The changes that are occurring lead to new kinds of fears for many men. These are fears they try to hide - often even from themselves. Certainly many men are coming to fear abandonment by women although they often repress it. With some men this may emerge as a variety of psychosomatic symptoms or an exacerbation of their competitiveness. "The latter expresses a vain hope that, by bringing home more loot from the jungle, they will forestall abandonment. This is probably an essential motivator for the male economic function."[10]

As men are confronted by the desire for personal and social changes by women they find themselves conservatives and defenders of the status quo. The impulses of conservatism come about when we face events that do not match our understanding or when we are confronted with deviation from what we see as normal and right behavior (i.e., when the

unquestionables are questioned). For the conservative, whatever happens, there must be continuity of past and present. Many believe that men will greatly benefit if women are given more rights, but most men have not been convinced. Men are playing the role of conservators of society, a role that was once believed to belong to women.

Men continue to develop elaborate rationales for their positions and why they should remain in power. They often turn to intellectual and academic justifications. They don't have to look far because most of the traditional wisdom of sociology and psychology is conservative. In sociology they turn to people like Talcott Parsons and his followers for evidence that women shouldn't try to compete with men. But the great rallying point continues to be Freud. Those who want to maintain the traditional sex role system turn to the early Freudian conceptualizations to justify their positions. As Lipman-Blumen observes, the rationale of traditional Freudian theory serves as the mortar that holds the bricks of the male social world in place. Women's attempts to amass resources, according to this theory, is an unfeminine act in itself. And the vicious circle is kept intact. The various institutions within society act to perpetuate the male world. They don't even need to deliberately conspire to keep women segregated but merely ignore their presence, and thus relegate them to the sidelines of life.[11] In psychology the view continues to stress women as nurturant, maternal and passive. This ranges from Freud's 'anatomy is destiny' to Erikson's claim that women's 'somatic design

men.'

Given the direction of change and the questioning of what has been, how do men deal with this? In the past women who questioned their destiny were seen as sick or ill and refusing to face the reality of what they were - as defined by men. Another reaction by men was to increase their notions of their masculinity, to create the super masculinity of machismo. This is a technique of trying to be even more manly by exaggeration and distortion. The role of 'machismo' for the male has its counterpart in the role of servility for the female.

Machismo is often the attempt by the male not to feel. If he can't stop himself from feeling, then he must stop himself from showing it. Because to feel will be to reveal weakness and it might let another inside him. The ultimate machismo is the super-cool stud who never shows anything. He only has one facial expression - bored and non-commital. For him manhood is what is what is seen and there is never anything to feel. If one can see beneath his surface, then his machismo mask has slipped. He must quickly replace the mask or his feelings will show. If that happened he wouldn't any longer be a real man - only a human being.

In many respects, coolness has become the middle class machismo. But what is important, whatever it is called, is that it hides emotions. Jack Nickols has observed that this is one of the most destructive facets of inter-

action, one which men enter to demonstrate their objectivity. When they are among themselves, this coolness often keeps them from drawing close. One man mistakes another's indifferent exterior for genuine indifference, which is usually not genuine but is instead calculated.[12]

The coolness of men reaches into many areas of their lives. This is often the case in the sexual area where being in control means to be cool and where you know exactly what you are doing in love-making so you will be a successful lover. Often the male must be cool and in control so that he is sure that he makes all the right moves so that his partner reaches her orgasm. But often the concern is not really with her sexual pleasure but rather that her orgasm is reaffirmation that he is a technically good lover, and therefore manly.

We would argue that males pay a high cost for hiding their emotions and being cool. The cost is that they have to repress and hide many genuine human feelings. And in doing so they lose some of the great rewards of humanness. Alan Watts has written that "far from being a form of strength, the masculine rigidity and toughness which we effect is nothing more than an emotional paralysis. It is assumed not because we are in control of our feelings but because we fear them, along with everything in our nature that is symbolically feminine and yielding."[13]

It may be thought that what we have been describing

is disappearing and that younger generations of men are different from their fathers. While there may be some change the evidence doesn't indicate very much. Many would think that among those young men who are more highly educated there would be significant changes. But even that is doubtful. Remember that one of the major forces in the emergence of the women's movement in the mid 1960s came from the radical university women who found the men they were working with were still asking them to make the coffee and stuff the envelopes. The stories that we read in the newspapers about married men staying at home to fill the traditional women's role are newsworthy because they are so rare. Recent studies of male students show many of the values about male superiority continue. Mirra Komorovsky found that the norm of masculine intellectual superiority has not been relinquished. She found that those males who answered affirmatively to the proposition: "It is appropriate for a mother of a preschool child to take a fulltime job" were upon further questioning, conditioned by such restrictions as "provided, of course, that the home was run smoothly, the children did not suffer, and the wife's job did not interfere with her husband's career."[14] She also found that when she divided her male respondents into types the 'feminist' type was the smallest. They were only seven per cent of her total. Those were the men who were willing to modify their own roles significantly to facilitate their future wives' careers."[15] Komorovsky further found that even equality of achievement of husband and wife is interpreted as a defeat for the man.

"The prospect of occupational rivalry with one's wife seems intolerable to contemplate."[16] Another study done at Oberlin College found that men tended to value highly an active career woman, but were ambivalent about whether family or career demands ought to take priority.[17]

What about the future possibilities of males' opening up? Probably not very much. For changes to occur in the basic male value system, resocialization is needed. But resocialization of persons in roles basic to their values are generally very difficult to bring about. Women are going through basic resocialization experiences and are reaching out for greater change. But generally men are not. Many men are upset over the change they see occurring in their wives, but are probably far more concerned with what their wives' changes mean for their lives. Women have something to reach toward, something they haven't had available before and something they want. But men have nothing new to reach for and in fact are looking over their shoulders at what they fear they are losing. Basically the problem for the male in this changing world is to unlearn the old sexist values. He must acquire an honest respect for women based on a notion of total equality. The man can no longer say he admires women because they are weak and helpless but rather he must turn to them for their strengths. To do this means that man must give up his special powers. It seems to us that real change will occur when power relationships are exchanged for caring ones. Men must give up the values of superiority not only because they don't work but more

important because they are immoral and anti-human. Men cannot assume superior status - neither can they afford to stop where they are. In caring relationships both partners continue growing and becoming.

Large numbers of men will doubtlessly continue to resist any change, and the costs to them will become greater. Being unable to be fully feeling individuals, they are crippled in their expression of needs for nurturance, love and dependency. Traditionally, they have depended on females to emote for them, but they must begin to feel for themselves.

With time there may be some changes in the sex roles and this is necessary. Where one seeks fulfillment in the male role as different from the female role, he has discarded human self-actualization. There is really no way that a woman can be 'feminine' or a man 'masculine' and also be fully human. "Tenderness, self-sacrifice, freedom to admit to fear and discomfort, forcefulness, independence, and willingness to expose one's self to danger in order to fully live in the world - all these are human qualities found in the true self-actualizer. When any one of these is carried to its extreme, it is a safe bet that one is dealing with the effects of sex role stereotyping and the diminution of human potential."[18]

Abraham Maslow wrote that the man mature in his personality development was not threatened by his weaknesses,

by his emotions, by his impulses or cognitions. "Therefore he is not threatened by what the adolescent would call 'feminity' but what we would prefer to call humanness. He seems able to accept human nature, and therefore he doesn't have to fight against it within himself, he doesn't have to subdue portions of himself."[19]

Possibly a crucial element in the positive change for the male is for him to get inside himself and find a sense of a true and private self. When we are able to relate our selves to our aloneness, we are greatly influenced by the amount and kind of love we can feel for ourselves. To feel love for your self is to feel good about what you are in the process of becoming. It is the feeling of integrity of self, that you are your own reason for being, and determinant of where you are going which allows self-love to develop. The self loving person is confident of their own self-evaluation. This means they do not need others for psychological security. It is not necessary to seek others to reassure one's self because confidence comes from inside. To the extent that one loves themself they can love others. The person who loves themself can say to another "I give you my love and it is yours to take if you choose. And if you choose to give me your love I may take it." This means that love is not a dependency but a giving relationship. It means that love is between two equal persons. Sidney Jourard has written that self-love gives one actual practice in loving. To the extent that others are similar, our ways of acting which

constitute self-love will in the giving make the other person happy. Self-love makes one attentive to their own needs, and increases sensitivity to the needs of others.[20] This love for the self and for the other is dependent on the willingness to face what is inside ourselves - this men must learn to do.

When love is as we have been describing it, it can lead to good and healthy relationships - relationships where each partner wants the other to do what each wants to do. Each person shows an active concern for the preservation of the integrity and autonomy of the other. This can be true even when it involves the dissolution of a relationship.

What appears to be crucial to relationships is the honesty of the persons with themselves and with each other. This honesty based on trust leads to an equality of persons, something many men find impossible with women. In what has come to be seen as healthy personal relationships, each partner must value the autonomy of the other and value the growth toward self-actualization for both the other and the self. When these are values that are held by one, they can come into conflict with the partner's different values. For example, in marriage, a husband may resist his wife's desires for education because he is afraid of her freedom. He wants her to continue to be dependent and compliant.

If men are to change and become more able to accept the reaching out to various options by women, it must be

done by giving up all notions of gender superiority. So long as there are clear-cut sex and gender roles, there is the implication of difference in expectations. When there is difference, this almost always implies that one role is better, more powerful and more significant. Basically men know this but are unwilling to give up what they have more of. They rarely realize what it is costing them to maintain this notion of superiority.

FOOTNOTES

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